

# Love God with Our Minds

By: Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard:

Thank you Dr. Fischer. I'm very glad to be here again to take part in the chapel service at Biola. And doubly so because of the special occasion which you're marking. I thought perhaps there will be nothing more useful today than to dwell upon the great commandment which Jesus Christ gave us in Matthew the 22nd chapter, and if you have a bible with you and would like to mark that verse I wish you turn to it. Where here, Jesus, Commands us to love God with our minds. And I would like to take the moments that I have to reflect with you on just what that means.

The answer at which Jesus gave, in summarizing the commandments was an answer to a question as to what the fundamentals of the law were. And this question was often put as it is in the 36th verse of the 22 chapter of Matthew by saying, "what is the great commandment" what is that commandment which encompasses all others within it. And Jesus answers and said "unto him, thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

this is the first and great commandment, and the second is akin to it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets. I believe that all of you are committed to the doing of this commandment. It is my understanding that that is why you are here, because you wish to serve God in an acceptable way, and I think we all know that that does not in the end reduce to a set of rules which my Government are external behavior, but to an inward Spirit. The Spirit which is precisely characterized by the words at which Jesus here gives. But having said all that, we need to ask ourselves the question how do you do it? And since we need a clear question before we can get a useful answer, I would like to ask you to think for just a moment. How do you love God with your mind? How do you love God with mind?

The very short answer is, you love God with your mind by focusing up on him and his works and giving your energies to understanding him and his works. In that way, you work for his glory. You work for, if we may say so without a long explanation, the good of God himself for that is what it is to love. It is to work in an intelligent manner for the good for the one who is loved, and to love God is to give our heart the very center of our being from which all of our life flows. It is to give our soul, that is to say, the organizing power of our natural being. It is to give our mind, and the word here is *dianoia*, and it refers to our understanding, our faculty, our capacity to inquire, and to think and to plan, and to distinguish and to relate, and it is to give that to God in the activity that is appropriate to it. The word *dianoia* is not used here only in the scriptures and it is a very common Greek word in Greek literature. It occurs also for example in first Peter 1:3 and it occurs in a very lovely phrase "for there we are admonished to gird up the loins of our minds." And I think we often need that. I'm afraid that some of us, in our understanding of God and of his

ways, are a little bit ragged. I suspect you have heard about the lady who was late for the trash truck. and as she charged out the door with half her hair in curlers and half out and clothes flying in all direction, she showed "Am I to late" and the man replied "Oh no lady, jump right in"

[Laughter]

She needed to be girded up, and some of us need to be girded up in the loins of our mind, in our understanding of God and of his ways. We love God with our minds by knowing him, by understanding him and his ways. I would like to break that apart into knowing him, and then talk briefly about knowing his ways. Today we are, I think, addicted to speaking in a very cheap and easy way about knowing God. And we are apt to use great words about our knowledge of God when in fact if we are pressed we are undone and we cannot explain what our knowledge of God consists in. There has been, over past decades, a tendency to exalt a kind of irrational-ism in our experience and our understanding of God. And one of the perversions of grace that has afflicted our day, is the idea that you can serve God by just being zapped on occasion either privately or in groups and that your knowledge of God consists of you being appropriately zapped. This is a terrible distortion of the nature of man and his relationship with God. To know is not just to be zapped. To know is to have an active carefully thought out understanding of God himself, in so far as that is available to us. One of the things that is very good in our day is the revival of natural theology. In our day there has come back into fashion and I'm sorry to for many decades it was out of fashion. The attempt, even on the part of those who are non-Christian, to take seriously the minds work in proving the existence and the elaborating of the nature of God, and

we have some very great philosophers in our time who are Christians and who are devoting themselves to the understanding in God in this fashion. We can spend a lot of time talking about that if we had the time which we don't. Now what I would like to say on this point is perhaps a little less philosophical than might suit the occasion today. What I want to say here is that in our efforts to know God we cannot be content with the thoughtless mouthing of sentences which happen to be true. We do not love God with our heart by repeating which we have only heard, but not thought out. We love God with our mind and our heart, when we give our heart and our mind to the understanding of the great doctrine of our faith of the trinity, of the incarnation, of the resurrection, of the everlasting life, of the incorporation of the scriptures. We cannot love God and we cannot honor him in our lives if we are too timid. If we are too timid to think about which these doctrines mean and why they are true and we do not see people free in the truth that makes us free by keeping questions away. Questions have to be brought up and dealt with honestly and fully, and then the fruit of that is that we are able to love God with our minds. And when we think of the incarnation, it is a meaningful, full conceptualization of a relationship of God to this world, which informs and inspires and directs everything that we do. the resurrection, the inspiration of the scriptures, the unity of God and so on become things which are as real and meaningful to us as our understanding on the house in which we live, or the vocation which we've chosen and I say once again, we cannot honor God and we cannot love him with our heart till we are too timid. If our faith is not big enough to ask the questions we must ask the questions and we must have a faith, that is big enough, to believe that God can handle the questions and lead us to an understanding that is wide and which will enable us to love him. We do not love our friends or our family members when we aren't afraid to inquire and to know them. They do not love us by avoiding our understanding of them. Love requires understanding, love requires

communication love does not survive, love does not, thrive on empty words, no matter how right those words may be, no matter how those words may be.

Let me quickly go on now to the second general aspect under which we love God. We love God in his works, and here we turn aside from those elements of understanding God, which fall more properly in the domain of theology or our studies of the bible and we look abroad to those other areas, sometimes called secular, but only because we don't understand God of right when we talk that way. The areas of history, of linguistics. The more vocational areas of public administration or law and all of those divisions of the world of the intellect with which I'm sure you are familiar, and we look at those and say " here in we find the works of God" and we study them as we study the footprints of a beloved friend in his creative and redeeming work in history. What is your major? English, or history, or perhaps chemistry or mathematics, in all of those areas we study those as the works of God with the reverence and the devotion and the enthusiasm that is appropriate to the works of someone whom we love. Education in general I'm afraid in our time has lost its way, and has tended to ever more to make our educational service, educational institutions and our educational traditions subservient many times to the mire greed and egotism of those who occupy the positions of learning. Charles Malik in a talk, which he gave some months ago before the Billy Graham institute at Wheaton College had these words to say, "At the heart of all of the problems facing western civilization, the general nervousness and restlessness that dearth of grace and beauty and quiet and peace of soul. The manifold blemishes and perversions of personal character. Problems of the family and social relations in general, problems of economics, and politics, problems of the media, problems affecting the school itself and the church itself. Problems in the international order, at the heart of the crisis in western

civilization lies the state of mind and the spirit in the universities" and this is true. In the western world, education, it has been said and rightly so has become the secular religion. It is in itself a false god and it is failing and it has failed, and we have come to the time in our own country where more and more we are suffering from simple incompetency in the functioning of the elemental structures of our social processes. Everything from not being able to make helicopters fly in a desert to not being able to make the banks run, to steel mills and other industries which are defunct because they are non-competitive. We are suffering, we are suffering from a lack of intellect, a lack of concentration, a lack of devotion and this is because we have ceased to look upon these areas as areas in which God might be served. The great Universities of the western world where founded out of devotion to God. This is true of the Universities in our own country and I could take time to read you the slogans which are written over their doors, but those words only honor God by being written in concrete. They don't enter the hearts of the people who make the educational institutions function and what I am saying to you is that we call, we are called to love God with our minds by taking all of these areas and claiming them for God. This is a part of the original charter of mankind, that it should go forth and subdue the earth and have dominion over it. It is a charter of the church which continuing in the tradition of the Jewish nation is appointed by God to show the world how to live and lead it in the right way in all of the areas of life. We love God with our minds by taking all of his works and understanding them and ruling and reigning in them by Christ Jesus who is the truth for the glory of God.

I was a young man in ministerial training in a college not unlike this. John R. Rice, who recently passed away, used to come by and one of the things that he said to us repeatedly was "If you trust God to fill your mouth when you get up he will fill it, with hot air, and if we trust God, simply

trust God without using our heart and our soul and our strength and our mind. Without using those faculties of the soul which he is appointed, to love and serve him, our minds will be filled with hot air." and one of the great perversion of grade in our time is the idea that truth will come to us simply by inspiration without any work. It will not, and one of the ways in which we turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, as is spoken of in the epistle of Jude, is through our sloth and timidity and unwillingness to serve God with our minds in the world in which we live.

Let me just conclude by reading to you one verse from John the 17th chapter and the third verse, and if you have never a definition of eternal life I hope you will, you will mark that verse. What is eternal life? Many people think that it is something that we get after we die. some people think we get it whether we want it or not after we die, but here in John 17:3 we are told by Christ that this is eternal life, that they might know the the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou has sin. Jesus the mighty logos and his father, to know them, to know them, to love them with our minds, to give our minds to fully understanding them in their works and in themselves is eternal life. I commend it to you. Thank you.